

Companions on the Journey

July 4, 2021

Dear Friends,

Today is the day when we celebrate our nation's Declaration of Independence from the United Kingdom under King George III in 1776. I have heard that in some circles it has become fashionable to disregard what took place at the end of the 18th century here in Philadelphia with the Continental Congress and focus on what took place in another part of America in 1619 (in Jamestown, Virginia), namely when the first ship of slaves brought captured African men and women to the shores of this country to sell on the American slave market. I do not dispute that that happened nor that it is despicable for one human being to claim that he or she owns another human being or can actually sell another human being as if they were so much property. That happened and that it happened is a horrendous part of our national history.

It is mistaken, though, in my mind, to make the claim that this ungodly event is actually what America was about from the beginning and has been about all throughout her history. Racial slavery and prejudice existed for a long time on these shores. And on many other shores all around the world. The slavery in our country ended with the Civil War and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Racial prejudice is sadly still with us. It would also not be true to claim that we as citizens of this great land have not come a long way from when the hatred was much more widespread and dangerous. But we are by no means out of the woods yet. Witness what has taken place in the George Flynn case

However, America was a colony of England for many years and received shabby treatment from her mother country. So much was this the case that the sentiment in the American colonies bubbled into rebellion against the Crown. But we were not England's only colonies. All over the globe Britain had colonized and controlled and subjugated many different geographical places and indigenous peoples—In India and Asia, in Canada, in the Middle East, and the Far East. Most of those geographical areas stayed under British Rule for centuries longer than the American colonies did. We had had enough of the heavy hand of the King and declared our Independence. That is what we celebrate this day all throughout our country. We hated to be subjugated ourselves and I believe that it took Lincoln's "four score and seven years" for all of America to realize that it was not right for anyone to subjugate anyone else, ever, for any reason.

Rewriting our history is not right nor is it helpful. Making our country a place of genuine racial justice is something that more and more desire and work towards. Let us celebrate our origins and our history of throwing off the abomination that slavery is. Let us also identify the injustices of the moment that still need to be addressed. Let us put our energies there instead of trying to blame and shame others. The way of Jesus Christ is as necessary now as it ever was.

In the Peace of Christ,

Msgr. McHenry